

1.191
BC83
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

THE COUNTY PLANNING PROJECT --
A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO AGRICULTURAL PLANNING

By Bushrod W. Allin,
Head, Division of State and Local Planning.

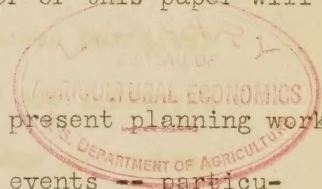
Address, Annual Meeting, American Farm Economic Association,
Philadelphia, December 28, 1939.

Present planning activity of the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges, sometimes called the county planning project and more recently described as the county land-use planning project, is one of the latest chapters in the history of a long succession of cooperative efforts on the part of these institutions to promote a better rural life. More specifically defined, it is a cooperative effort on the part of the various agencies of the Department of Agriculture, the Land-Grant Colleges, related State and local agencies, and representative farmers in each locality, State, and in the nation as a whole, to develop and currently revise agricultural plans and policies that will serve to coordinate various agricultural programs and related public activities, to increase their effectiveness in promoting long-time as well as emergency objectives, and to develop needed additional programs. The remainder of this paper will be an elaboration of this definition.

Like the chapters of any continued story, present planning work can be understood best in the light of preceding events -- particularly those of the more recent past. Experience thus far with the various agricultural programs started since 1933 has developed three important and related problems for the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges: (1) The problem of how to administer a national program in such a manner as to accomplish its national

FEB 28 1940

PA 2C83
1.941



objectives and at the same time to fit the program to the many local variations in physical and economic conditions so that it will serve the needs of each locality most effectively; (2) the problem of how to unify or coordinate the various Federal, State, and local agricultural programs so that they are essentially a single program when they reach the individual farm; and (3) the problem of clarifying the responsibilities and working relationships of the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges.

The first of these three problems developed with the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933. It was then recognized that any program involving acreage quotas, established on a historical base and applied uniformly throughout the nation, might function effectively as an emergency program, but that if such a program took on aspects of permanency, differential adjustments that would fit the economic and physical conditions of each locality would have to be instituted if we were to avoid the undesirable consequences of ignoring the economic principle of comparative advantage. Stated differently, it was felt that a national program, operating as a long-time program, should not serve to prevent a shift in cotton production from the Georgia Piedmont to the plains of Texas and the irrigated areas of the Southwest, if, because of an efficiency differential due to improvements in technology and other changes, cotton production under normal conditions would tend to decline in the one area and expand in the other.

In anticipation of this danger, and in the belief that the Agricultural Adjustment Program was evolving from an emergency to a long-time program, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, in cooperation with the Extension Service, started the present county

planning project in the late summer and fall of 1935. As you will recall, this project followed closely on the heels of the regional adjustment research project, which was a cooperative effort on the part of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Experiment Stations throughout the country to find a basis upon which a program of differential adjustments might be developed. This latter project asked the experts what adjustments, by areas, were needed in the interest of conservation, good farming, and good land use. The county planning project asked farmers throughout the country the same question.

While considering this need for differential adjustments, a problem still confronting the Department and the Colleges, the problem of coordination of the various programs was rapidly becoming a major issue. This arose from the fact that other programs, such as Submarginal Land Purchase, Crop Insurance, Commodity Loans, Marketing Agreements, Surplus Disposal, Soil Conservation, Farm Security, Farm Forestry, and others had either just been launched or were being developed. Generally, each of these programs is authorized by a separate Act of the Congress; and they all charge the Secretary of Agriculture with responsibility for efficient administration. Each of them usually deals with only one segment of the complex problem of raising and stabilizing agricultural income, achieving stability in the use of our land and water resources, and otherwise promoting a better rural life.

Because of the rapidity with which the programs were launched, and in view of the fact that the Congress itself had given only general consideration to the relationship of these programs one to another, it was inevitable that in their administration instances of ineffectiveness, conflict and duplication would arise, particularly when two or more of the programs were applied to the same farm and affected the same land.

Regardless of how well conceived these programs might have been, as described by the Acts themselves and by the general administrative rules and regulations, the real test of whether they made sense in relation to one another came when they were applied in the field to particular situations. There have been sufficient instances of a lack of harmony between programs to cause the Secretary to seek ways and means of promoting better coordination. One of the first consequences of his efforts in this direction was the establishment of the Office of Land Use Coordination.

Concurrently with the emergence of both the problem of fitting the national programs to local conditions and the problem of effecting a proper coordination of the various programs, there developed what has come to be known as the "Federal-States relations problem" -- more accurately described as the problem of relations between the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges. Federal funds for assisting the States in carrying on research and extension work are appropriated on a grant-in-aid basis, and are administered by the Department of Agriculture under very general rules and regulations, thus permitting a high degree of State autonomy. This kind of Federal-State relation was the dominant type when the Department began its so-called "action" programs in 1933, programs financed not by grant-in-aid funds, but entirely by Federal funds for which the Secretary of Agriculture was made responsible.

When these programs went into operation in the States, it was logical and natural for the Department to rely upon the Cooperative Extension organization with its system of county agricultural agents as the field machinery for getting them under way. But from the time the Agricultural Adjustment Program was started as the first of the new programs, the Colleges reacted in various ways. Some said they wanted to administer all the programs. Others said they wanted nothing to do with them because

theirs were purely educational and research institutions. And there were all shades of opinion between these extremes. It was evident that sooner or later this question of relationships between the Colleges and the new agencies of the Department must be clarified. To this end, it was agreed at the annual meeting of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities at Houston, Texas, in the fall of 1937 that the Association and the Department would each appoint a committee to study the problem and to meet later for the purpose of working out a mutually acceptable solution.

In the spring of 1938, the Department committee came to the conclusion that this problem of Federal-State relationships and the other two problems -- namely, the problem of fitting national programs to local needs and that of coordinating the national programs -- were simply different aspects of the same broad problem of making the work of the Department and the Colleges more effectively fit the requirements of agriculture in a changed economic and political environment. It formulated a proposal, therefore, for dealing with all three problems at once. The proposal was that the Department should retain full responsibility for administering its "action" programs, and that the Colleges and the Department proceed at once in each locality and State to cooperate in the development of land-use plans which might serve as a basis for localizing and correlating all programs.

Both committees met at Mount Weather, Virginia, on July 8, 1938, to consider this proposal, and the outcome of their discussions was a document that has come to be known as the Mount Weather Agreement. This agreement includes the major suggestions of the Department committee, and a rather detailed description of a proposed organization for planning. Among other things, the suggested organization included a State Committee in each State,

consisting of a representative of each of the action agencies of the Department, the State Director of Extension as chairman of the Committee, the State Director of the Experiment Station, State representatives of any other State agencies having responsibility for land-use programs, and a number of representative farm men and women. Also, it was proposed that a committee be established in each county with the county agricultural agent as secretary, and consisting of 10 to 20 farm men and women and any county representatives of agencies included on the State Committee, as well as those of any strictly local agencies responsible for programs directly affecting those of the other agencies. It was suggested further that community committees consisting of representative farm men and women be established to assist the county committees and that this entire organization should address itself first to the task of developing a land-use plan which would spell out precisely the longer term objectives which all of the agencies operating in each area should undertake to achieve.

After agreeing that State and local planning needed to be done, that it was a joint responsibility of the Department, the Colleges, and local people, and that a logical way to begin was to develop land-use plans, the question arose as to what procedure in land-use planning was necessary if the results were to be useful to the Department as well as to State and local agencies. It was evident that ultimately the work would have to be done in such a manner that results on both sides of political boundaries, whether they be county or State boundaries, would be comparable.

As an initial step in formulating a cooperative program of work to insure such comparability of results, the Department was urged to

prepare a statement embodying its conception of the type of land-use planning work which should be undertaken. After a number of conferences, the several agencies of the Department agreed upon a proposal that has come to be known as County Land-Use Planning Work Outline No. 1. This proposal was then discussed with Land-Grant College representatives in a series of regional conferences and adopted as a general guide for the first phase of intensive planning work. It is a suggested procedure by which local planning committees can: (1) Identify and analyze local land-use areas which are essentially homogeneous with respect to physical characteristics, present land use, and problems of adjustments; and (2) make recommendations for appropriate land-use adjustments in each area.

After the Department had committed itself at Mount Weather to cooperate with the Colleges in the development of land-use plans and had proposed procedures for doing so, it became evident to the Secretary that the Department itself was not organized to cooperate effectively with the proposed State and local planning organizations. There was no agency in the Department that had responsibility for general planning for the Department as a whole. The Office of Land Use Coordination was handling administrative coordination, both within the Department and inter-departmentally. In correcting this weakness, the Secretary reorganized the Department and designated the Bureau of Agricultural Economics as the general planning agency for the Department. To meet this new responsibility, the Bureau itself was reorganized to include, among other things, a Division of State and Local Planning with a representative in each State, and an Interbureau Coordinating Committee in Washington to advise with the Bureau chief. In addition, an Agricultural Program Board was established to serve as an advisory council to the Secretary. This Board consists of the heads of the action

agencies, the Chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the Department's directors; the Land Use Coordinator is chairman.

Since the Mount Weather Agreement was only an agreement between two committees and did not bind either the individual States or any specific agency, and since the reorganization of the Department occurred subsequent to the Mount Weather conference, it was considered necessary to formalize the terms of these relationships by two memoranda of understanding -- one between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and each Land-Grant College and another between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the various action agencies of the Department. The first of these two memoranda covers the essential points of the Mount Weather Agreement, includes provisions recognizing changes made subsequently in the organization of the Department, and provides that the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics shall be secretary of the State Committee. It also provides that during each year for which the memorandum shall remain in effect, planning work shall be carried forward in at least one county in the State to the point of developing an action program.

This particular provision transforms planning into planning-in-action, and refers to what has come to be known more recently as the "unified program county". It is inserted as an insurance policy against the possibility that planning may become merely pointless discussion, as well as for the purpose of allaying the often-expressed fear on the part of State people that the Department might not pay any attention to the recommendations of State and local committees.

Another significant provision of the memorandum is that there shall be established at each College a Land-Grant College-BAE Committee of three men, consisting of the project leader, who is appointed by the

Director of Extension, a representative of the Agricultural Experiment Station and the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. This three-man committee functions not only in an advisory relationship to the agencies it represents, but it is also a working committee for assisting the State Land-Use Planning Committee previously described. Under the terms of the memorandum of understanding, it has responsibility for developing details of procedure to be followed in the planning work, for encouraging the development of related research work, and for formulating the provisions of the annual project agreement covering the cooperative work of the three agencies most directly concerned with the task of guiding the planning program. The memorandum between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the various other agencies of the Department is a declaration of willingness to cooperate in doing the general planning work for which the Bureau is charged with primary responsibility.

So much for mechanics and the more recent history. What are our hopes, fears, and expectations? The basic assumption underlying the whole effort is that for the indefinite future the Congress of the United States will continue to charge the Department of Agriculture with responsibility for administering large-scale action programs. If this assumption is valid, it is difficult to question the desirability of a procedure by which the several agencies can work out as nearly as possible an agreement as to what they are individually or collectively trying to accomplish. Fundamentally, the principal problems of our agriculture nationally are either the result of the disappearance of a part of our foreign market or of our unwillingness to sell our surpluses at prices the world is willing to pay. In the past, our nation may have helped produce this situation through its own tariff policies; but however that may be, it is plain that America acting

cannot correct the world-wide ills of agriculture. This requires international cooperation which, at the moment at least, doesn't look too hopeful. Our only alternative is to do the best we can in the world as it is. Conditions are apparently going to be such that farmers will continue to demand, and get, government action that will influence their economic condition fully as much as in the immediate past. This seems to be the prospect regardless of which political party may be in control of the Federal Government.

Besides the basic assumption, there are two secondary assumptions that rest quite as much on philosophy as on logic. These are: (1) That planning should be developed through widespread farmer participation; and (2) that the planning process itself is a desirable procedure for the promotion of coordination.

The collapse of laissez-faire in government policy is world-wide. The trend toward strong central governments, whether they be democratic or totalitarian, is universal and inevitable. In the light of this prospect, it behooves all democratic nations interested in preserving and perfecting the democratic process to devise ways and means by which the decisions of government can be made with the greatest possible participation by the people most directly affected. Even if the experts and administrators, acting alone, could develop plans for public agricultural programs that would be as good as those that could be developed through farmer participation, it would still be undesirable for them to do so, for such procedure would be contrary to the democratic ideal. And by no means the least of the benefits expected to flow from farmers assuming active responsibility for assisting in program planning is its possible educational effect. There is no more effective method of learning than by doing. Hence, we want

widespread farmer participation for its own sake and not merely because of its contribution to technical refinement of the plan itself.

As a matter of fact, the best plans cannot be developed by technicians and administrators alone, for these tend to be specialists rather than generalists. The task of synthesis or of determining the relationships of the parts to the whole cannot be done adequately without the assistance of the layman who is confronted with the whole problem and not merely with part-problems. Both philosophy and science are involved in his decisions, and democracy itself is a philosophy as well as a form of government. Moreover, the farmer has a contribution to make to planning that lies within the fields of the various specialists, but which is the outgrowth of an experience he has had in operating farms and farm land, an experience which is both complementary and supplementary to that of the specialist.

On the other hand, to recognize both the desirability and the necessity for farmer participation is not to conclude that the administrator and technician are useless. They, too, have valuable contributions to make in program building, and the organization for planning must include them if the results of planning are not to be just as defective as they would be without the farmers' contribution. It is conceded that real progress might be made toward coordination of the various programs of the Department and the Colleges by committees that do not include farmer membership, but the inclusion of representative farmers in discussions of problems of unification will exert a constructive influence on the result of such discussions.

The two processes for achieving coordination are: (1) The process of command and obedience or the "big stick method"; and (2) discussion and

mutual agreement or "compromise". It is the philosophy of the Department and the Colleges that unification achieved through the latter process is most likely to be workable and has the best chance to endure. No one is wise enough to be a dictator. In terms of procedure, therefore, the purpose of county planning is to establish an organization that is recognized as having the responsibility for studying and discussing all public agricultural programs, particularly those of the Department and the Colleges, in their relation to one another, and for working out with the administrators of such programs proposals for improving their application.

Throughout the United States, county agents have worked for many years with advisory committees of farmers whose function it was to assist in the development of extension programs. The county agent long ago learned that all wisdom didn't originate at the agricultural colleges and that he could develop a better and more workable program when he listened also to the advice and counsel of representative farmers in his county. The scope of interest of these farmer committees was broad, and the only reason they were concerned primarily with the extension program was due to the fact that extension was virtually the only public agricultural program in the county. The essential change that has occurred since 1933 is the introduction -- or intrusion, if you like -- of several new public action programs, some having administrative officials in the counties. Until after the Mount Weather conference, no single committee in the county had any recognized advisory relationship to all of the programs. Present planning committees are planning not merely for an extension program, but for all programs operating in the county.

Extension workers sometimes feel maligned by current references to the more recent agricultural programs as "action" programs. They take this as something of an inference that theirs is a program of inaction. Of course, no such meaning is intended. In the first place, an educational program is one form of public action toward the achievement of a public purpose; and in the second place, many county agents can testify that even before 1933 their work was not merely educational. Sometimes contrary to the wishes of their superiors, these agents have seen their county advisory committees advise them to do all manner of service work that by no stretch of the imagination could be described merely as education. The pertinent questions concerning extension programs do not turn on the question of action or inaction, but on the kind of action.

There are some high-minded and able members of our "agricultural fraternity" who instinctively flinch at even a reference to some of our more recent agricultural programs. This reaction is usually traceable to their deep-seated opposition to what they call "subsidy". In this attitude, they seem to be totally oblivious to the fact that Federal "subsidy" to agriculture and Federal "agricultural" legislation first began on a large scale during the Civil War when the Congress authorized the establishment of both the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges. Earlier legislation of direct concern to the farmer can be described more appropriately as "general" legislation, since the Civil War marked the turning point in our shift from an agricultural to an industrial nation. Prior to this point in our history, a giant agriculture promoted the general welfare by "subsidizing" infant industry; thereafter a giant industry has done it by "subsidizing" a depressed agriculture. In any event, during

the latter period it was the farmers primarily who were calling subsidies to industry by that name.

From the close of the Civil War until the first World War, colleges, experiment stations and extension services were the principal "subsidies" our farmers were able to get from a business-minded government. During that time, the idea prevailed that public assistance to the farmer was appropriately limited largely to education and research. But from 1920 until the great price collapse of 1929, forces were set in motion which began to change this attitude. Finally, under the pressure of extreme conditions, and again in response to the demands of farmers through their legislative representatives, the Federal Government began in 1933 to launch programs that differ from its previous activities in at least two important respects: (1) They undertake on a larger scale to do things that informed individuals, acting as individuals, cannot do, and (2) to the extent that they continue to rely upon individual action, they give relatively more attention to assisting the individual in acting, without decreasing the work of teaching him how to act. The outstanding example of a program illustrating the first of these two distinctions is the effort to establish parity income through production control, parity payments and other measures. An activity illustrating the second distinction is the granting of aids for erosion control on individual farms.

The planning the county agent and his advisory committee did in pre-1933 days will not meet present needs, simply for the reason that there is now public authority to take action along lines that were impossible in those days. Of what use was it then for a county committee to do the kind of planning that would be helpful in the rehabilitation of low-

income farm families? There was neither existing nor prospective authority to do anything about it if such plans were made. Today, such authority exists through programs like those of the Farm Security Administration, and action will be taken whether general planning is done or not. In fact, it is being taken. We are simply confronted with the prospect of continued authority to do many things that we couldn't do before 1933; and the longer such authority exists, the more the programs tend to become permanent rather than emergency in character and the greater will be the necessity for developing both comprehensive and detailed specifications by which both emergency and long-time programs can make the greatest possible contribution to long-time objectives as well as to those of an emergency nature. In other words, while the public is giving funds to a farmer to meet emergency requirements, it is the logical time so to administer those funds as to make the greatest possible contribution to permanent improvement, to alter the underlying conditions through soil conservation and other changes.

After more than a year of activity following the Mount Weather conference, memoranda of understanding providing for this type of planning have been negotiated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics with 45 of the 48 States, and the work has been started on three levels of intensity: (1) Preparatory work, (2) intensive land-use planning, and (3) the development of unified county programs. Preparatory work consists mainly of organizing committees, discussing with them the general problems, and indicating to them that as soon as technical personnel are available to assist them, they will be asked to initiate for their county the area analysis and land classification work as a first step in the intensive planning suggested in Work Outline No. 1. The intensive work is being done, or will be undertaken this winter, in about 800 counties, each county

representing a major type-of-farming area within a State. In most States, work is under way in at least one county in each State to develop a unified program for administration in 1940 or as soon thereafter as possible. This is the most intensive form of planning work. It is hoped that all counties will eventually become unified program counties. Already some of these counties have made recommendations that are not only being given serious consideration by the agencies affected, but are quite likely to be adopted. Where an adopted recommendation has an application to a wider area than the county in which it was developed, a State Committee might recommend its extension; and the national administration might possibly apply it over a still wider area than a State.

Thus, planning is a continuous process. No unified program is ever finished. It is not a blueprint that is made in a few weeks, adopted or rejected, and then forgotten. It is a growing thing, constantly subject to modification. Nor is the whole planning program something concocted by any single individual or group of individuals. It is the outgrowth of conditions and circumstances that have developed over the years, particularly since 1920. It is both like and unlike what Extension "has always done". It is just as unlike pre-1933 planning as present programs are unlike pre-1933 programs. The differences center largely in two points: (1) It seeks to meet different needs, and (2) it requires the participation of broader and more varied interests. Qualifications for technical leadership in this job are much broader than the traditional technical training of county agents. The county planning leader of the future will need to be something of a statesman, diplomat, politician, philosopher, economist, scientist and farmer, all wrapped in one.

If there are any questions in your minds as to why the Department puts so much emphasis on the organization for planning, it is because of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of divorcing means from ends. Coordination will not be achieved unless the right people look at the pertinent facts at the right time. None of the planning committees has any administrative authority. Each is wholly advisory, and its successful functioning requires mutual confidence and respect on the part of cooperating agencies. It is a cooperative enterprise that is destined to fall short of its objectives wherever affected agencies are excluded from participation in it, or wherever any one agency succeeds in dominating the whole process.

In conclusion, I should like to give my answer to a question that has been raised frequently as to what is meant by the term "land-use planning". Particularly since the Mount Weather conference, the term "land use" has been associated with our planning activities, and it has served to cause more efforts at hair-splitting than any other single thing that has happened. It is not possible to frame a definition of land-use planning which is satisfactory to a land-use specialist and at the same time describes what is being done under the label. My answer, therefore, to anyone who requests a definition is to say that I have none, that I will be glad to tell him what the job is we are trying to do, and that if after I have described the job, he doesn't like the term, he should call it anything he likes. I hope that this paper describes the job.

The only reason the term "land use" has been given such prominence in our recent activities is that it was the land-use implications of the various programs of the Department that were most prominent in revealing the need for better coordination of programs. The Department and the

colleges believe that an analysis of land-use problems is the best place to begin, but they are interested in planning land use only as it serves as a sound foundation and a good point of departure for more comprehensive planning. We have no desire to restrict any committee's interest in planning to some arbitrarily defined field of "land use". In planning for land use, moreover, there is no intention to ignore people, or the "human" side of the problem. By "land use", we mean, of course, use of land by people.

Nor is the Department interested in a kind of planning that will serve only to coordinate its own programs with one another. It is equally concerned with the problem of correlating its programs with related State and local programs and with programs of other Departments of the Federal Government. To express this interest, however, is neither to promise that it will adopt every local recommendation nor to say that it arrogates to itself the whole function of national planning. One of the purposes of the planning procedure here described will have been served when the agencies of the Department provide local committees with thorough and understandable explanations of why their suggestions will or will not be adopted. By this two-way process of exchanging ideas, understanding will be fostered -- the kind of understanding essential to agreement.

With respect to other Federal Departments and the State Planning Boards, it is the policy of the Department to promote the closest possible cooperation. Agricultural planning and agricultural land-use planning, even though oriented in terms of farmer interests, are inextricably related to industrial, urban and other major fields of interest. In the case of all issues that can be resolved only through collaboration with planners in these other fields, the National Resources Committee and the State

Planning Boards are expected to provide the necessary organization.

Meanwhile, agriculture has its own job to do, and the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges are the logical public agencies to assume primary responsibility for helping the farmers do it.

Planning is inescapable, not something we can choose to do or not do. The particular methods by which we do it, of course, are always subject to change, and I know of no one who is so sure of all the details of present procedure that he would be willing to predict that they will not be changed. Experience will dictate modifications, but plan we must.

